

Agency: 477 Department of Fish and Wildlife
Decision Package Code/Title: AB Wildfire Season Costs
Budget Period: 2011-13
Budget Level: M2 - Inflation and Other Rate Changes

Recommendation Summary Text:

Each year, wildfires on Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife's (WDFW) lands cause damage to habitat, facilities and wildlife. WDFW is required to pay local fire districts and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), who are responsible for fire suppression activities on WDFW lands. Funding is requested for fire suppression, habitat restoration, and winter feeding associated with 2011 and 2012 wildfires. This work is necessary to protect human health, facilities and structures, and fish and wildlife habitat. Current budget levels do not include funding for these activities and WDFW requests a permanent appropriation similar to how fire suppression costs are provided to DNR in order to secure consistent funding for this activity.

Fiscal Detail

Operating Expenditures	<u>FY 2012</u>	<u>FY 2013</u>	<u>Total</u>
001-1 General Fund - Basic Account-State	235,000	235,000	470,000
Total Cost	235,000	235,000	470,000

Package Description:

Current budget levels do not include funding for wildfire suppression, winterfeeding and habitat restoration activities. This request is a placeholder to address anticipated costs associated with wildfires that occur during the 2011 and 2012 wildfire seasons. An update will be provided once the fire season is over and suppression and recovery costs have been identified.

Fire suppression prevents fires from spreading to private lands, including important commercial timberlands. Habitat restoration is often required after a wildfire to provide suitable habitat for fish and wildlife by controlling erosion, restoring native perennial vegetation, and limiting the spread of noxious weeds. Also, providing alfalfa hay for elk prevents them from moving onto private lands in search of food resulting in reduced damage claims by crop growers.

Each year there is a high risk of wildfires causing impacts to WDFW owned habitat and property, including fences and other structures. WDFW is required to pay local fire districts and DNR for fire suppression services. After a fire, immediate habitat rehabilitation is often required to control erosion, restore native perennial vegetation, and limit the spread of noxious weeds. Loss of habitat can result in greater winter wildlife mortalities. To mitigate habitat loss caused by devastating fires, winterfeeding is often necessary to prevent damage to private lands from wildlife seeking food. Habitat restoration and winterfeeding serve to decrease wildlife damage claims and the resulting compensation paid to landowners.

Without additional funding to address wildfire associated costs, WDFW will be forced to absorb the costs required to be paid to local fire districts and DNR for fire suppression, thus resulting in a reduction of core activities.

Supplemental funding will cover costs associated with wildfires on WDFW lands, including fire suppression, habitat restoration and rehabilitation, facility and structure replacement and winter feeding activities.

Damaged habitat for fish and wildlife will be rehabilitated and restored quickly through seeding and planting vegetation, fertilizing, weed control, and establishing water bars and other erosion control measures. Winter mortalities and wildlife damage to private lands will be minimized and DNR and local fire districts will receive payment for their fire suppression activities.

WDFW is requesting a permanent appropriation. Similar to how fire suppression costs are paid by DNR, WDFW requests an on-going appropriation in order have consistent funding for this activity. Funds not needed would remain unspent and if additional funds are needed during a particularly bad fire season, then an additional amount would be requested. This will provide a more consistent means of funding and will not necessitate a budget request each year.

Wildfire suppression is triggered by wildfires throughout the fire season, typically June through September. WDFW has agreements in place with DNR and local fire districts to respond to wildfires on WDFW lands. After the fire damage assessment, habitat rehabilitation, and structure replacement will occur in the spring. Feeding during the winter is necessary if forage has been destroyed during the fire.

This package would provide funding for fires that occur statewide.

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Narrative Justification and Impact Statement

What specific performance outcomes does the agency expect?

WDFW's statutory responsibilities include the protection, preservation and perpetuation of fish and wildlife and associated habitat. Fire suppression costs are required to protect people, wildlife, and habitat, and to keep fires from spreading to private lands. Fire suppression on WDFW-owned property also protects adjacent private orchards and agricultural lands by reducing the loss of browse and forage vegetation that deer and elk depend on. Additionally, protecting and rehabilitating wildlife habitat on public lands, providing winter feed until forage resources rebound, and providing landowner compensation for agricultural losses can reduce wildlife conflicts with adjacent landowners.

Performance Measure Detail

Activity: A039 Land Management

Incremental Changes

No measures submitted for package

Is this decision package essential to implement a strategy identified in the agency's strategic plan?

This decision package contributes directly to Goal 1, "Conserve and protect native fish and wildlife", as identified in the WDFW 2011-17 Strategic Plan. Fire suppression, habitat restoration and winterfeeding allow the Department to manage its wildlife areas to protect diverse wildlife populations and provide compatible wildlife recreational opportunities.

Does this decision package provide essential support to one of the Governor's priorities?

This decision package relates to the Governor's priority, "Concern for Our Environment" and supports the WDFW mission of protecting, restoring, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Does this decision package make key contributions to statewide results? Would it rate as a high priority in the Priorities of Government process?

This decision package makes a key contribution to the statewide result, "Improve the Quality of Washington's Natural Resources." The activity "Manage Land and Access" is funded as a highest priority purchase. The need to "Protect Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat" is funded as a lower priority purchase with the strategy to preserve, maintain, and restore natural systems and landscapes.

What are the other important connections or impacts related to this proposal?

Wildfire suppression, habitat restoration of burned areas, winterfeeding and landowner compensation will reduce the potential for human/wildlife conflicts as well as minimize potential for wildlife mortalities this winter.

Recently, DNR informed WDFW staff that their ability to provide fire suppression on non-forested lands is not statutorily authorized. This may require a more costly means of obtaining fire suppression for these lands.

What alternatives were explored by the agency, and why was this alternative chosen?

The most expedient and efficient suppression techniques are chosen to control each fire situation. Habitat restoration is not proposed for all lands burned. Some lands recover naturally over time and other areas cannot be treated cost effectively. Devastating fires resulting in forage destruction necessitate feeding deer and elk during the winter. Funding in the land management base budget is insufficient to cover these unpredictable emergency situations.

What are the consequences of not funding this package?

Not funding wildfire suppression costs will prevent WDFW from meeting contractual obligations for fire suppression. Without rehabilitation and winterfeeding activities, big game winter range will not be able to support wintering deer and elk. As a result, animal damage claims will increase with no funding to address them. Weed problems and erosion will increase and the wildlife carrying capacity of the range will decline. Federally listed salmonids often live in streams adjacent to lands affected by wildfires. Not funding rehabilitation activities will reduce WDFW's ability to limit sediment delivery into rivers, thereby causing a negative impact to fish stocks.

What is the relationship, if any, to the state's capital budget?

None at this time. However, capital facilities are often destroyed in wildfires. In this event, a capital budget request package would be developed.

What changes would be required to existing statutes, rules, or contracts, in order to implement the change?

None.

Expenditure and revenue calculations and assumptions

Cost estimates are based on a 10 year average. Exact costs resulting from wildfires on WDFW lands will be provided after the current fire season is complete and suppression costs and recovery plans have been identified. Extra authority will revert to GF-S balance.

Goods and services include \$235,000 for costs related to fire suppression activities, range rehabilitation (e.g., seeding, planting, equipment rental), winter feeding, structure replacement and landowner agreements.

Which costs and functions are one-time? Which are ongoing? What are the budget impacts in future biennia?

Similar to how fire suppression costs are dealt with by DNR, WDFW requests an on-going appropriation in order have consistent funding for this activity. Funds not needed would remain unspent and if additional funds are needed during a particularly strenuous fire season, an additional amount would be requested at that time.

<u>Object Detail</u>		<u>FY 2012</u>	<u>FY 2013</u>	<u>Total</u>
E	Goods And Services	235,000	235,000	470,000